

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 003851

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2015

TAGS: [KISL](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [BG](#) [PPAO](#)

SUBJECT: TEA WITH ISLAMIST FIREBRANDS

REF: STATE 121757

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, reason para 1.4 b.

11. (C) Summary. At their initiative, four senior Islamist scholars and clerics met with CDA to defend their stance on Ahmadiyas, urge greater USG-Islamist cooperation, and promise to fight extremism "if" any is found in Bangladesh. They argued that branding Ahmadiyas as non-Muslim would make them an identifiable and therefore protectable minority. CDA underscored USG respect for Islam, and encouraged them to condemn terrorism whenever and wherever it occurs. End Summary.

12. (C) On August 2, Charge, A/DCM, and PolFSN hosted for tea: Moulana Ubaidal Haq, Khateeb, Baitul Mukarram National Mosque; Shaikul Hadis Allama Azizul Haq, Chairman Islami Oikko Jote; Moulana Fazlul Karim, Pir Saheb Charmonai and Amir, Islamic Constitution Movement; Moulana Muhiuddin Khan, Senior Vice Chairman, Islami Oikko Jote; and A.M.M. Bahauddin, editor of Daily Inquilab and Senior Vice President of Jamiatul Musarresin madrasa teachers)). Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini, MP and Chairman, Islami Oikko Jote, was a last-minute no-show because, according to group organizer Bahauddin, PM Zia convoked him deliberately at the same time as the tea to prevent his attendance.

13. (SBU) Bahauddin opened by stating that the USG and Islamists had been allies during the Cold War and that both sides should work to restore a similar level of cooperation and inter-action to counter growing leftism in Europe and elsewhere. "You need true friends on your side who understand the issues. Only genuine Islamic scholars can represent and lead the people." He acknowledged differences over Iraq, but stated this should not be misinterpreted as an anti-American or anti-Western stance. For example, he claimed, during anti-war protests in Dhaka, there had deliberately been no burning of the American flag. Muhiuddin added that madrasas had become involved in politics only to support the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan. No Bangladeshis, he said, had gone to support the Taliban, but yet there is now an effort to "destroy" madrasas in Bangladesh.

14. (SBU) Azizul Haq asked why the USG is so unhappy with them over Ahmadiyas. Ubaidal Haq regretted that USG visitors had gone to see the Ahmadiyas without meeting with the Islamists. "We support religious freedom, but we don't want them to mislead real Muslims. They are separate, and many countries have declared them non-Muslims to stop this kind of problem." Asked if this means Islamists would not protect Ahmadiyas unless they were declared non-Muslims, Ubaidal Haq told CDA, "To be protected, they must be identifiable as a minority."

15. (SBU) Religious freedom and protection of minorities are important, constitutionally-guaranteed rights in Bangladesh, CDA observed. Ubaidal Haq agreed, saying this is why Ahmadiyas should be declared non-Muslims--to become a minority that would be protected by both government and civil society, including Islamists. He downplayed reported attacks on Ahmadiyas as false or exaggerated; some incidents, he claimed, are staged and videos are faked to advance internal Ahmadiya rivalries.

16. (SBU) Drawing on reftel points, CDA underscored USG respect for Islam and noted that, in the war on terrorism, our focus is on extremists of any kind. She welcomed the condemnation by the absent Amini of the July 7 London attacks, and urged all Islamist leaders to denounce violence and especially suicide attacks whenever and wherever they occur. Bahauddin stated that all the Islamist leaders at this meeting condemned the London attacks. Extremism is un-Islamic, Muhiuddin added, so there is nothing to disagree about. "Suicide killings are illegal in Islam, and we will continue to say so in our mosques."

17. (SBU) Asked about the origins of extremism and strategies for defeating it, Muhiuddin asserted that extremism is absent and will never take root in Bangladesh. If you see any, he said, tell us, and we will fight it together. The 70-minute meeting concluded with Muhiuddin asking us to investigate an article in an Egyptian magazine that reported the USG and Israel are rewriting the Koran, in 12 volumes, "to create chaos" in the Muslim world.

18. (C) Comment: Bahauddin handed over to CDA a three-page memorandum that summarized most of the above points and also

"expressed deep concern" (the same language used to address the London attacks) "at the inhuman atrocities and torture meted out to the inmates of various jails, including those in Iraq." This outreach by senior Islamist figures, most of whom have often been strongly critical of the U.S., was initiated in May by Bahauddin at the height of his efforts to organize Islamist opposition to the BDG for a variety of political and business reasons; recently, he appears to have had a reconciliation of sorts with PM Zia. Ambassador Thomas's unexpected departure from post delayed the meeting, whose original aim, we believe, was to promote a political identity for Islamist scholars separate from Jamaat Islami and bolster Bahauddin's standing as an Islamist power broker. The meeting was dominated by the Ahmadiya and other local issues, with only one passing reference to Iraq. Amini's absence was peculiar. Highly critical of PM Zia in private, he nevertheless reportedly felt obliged as an IOJ coalition member to inform her of the meeting; according to Bahauddin, Zia begged him not to attend because of his "loose tongue." Her concern must have been that he would have repeated his criticisms of her government since, in our prior meetings with him, he, like the Islamists at this meeting, has always been on his best, most conciliatory behavior. A/DCM is taking up Ubaidal Haq's and Muhiuddin's offers for (separate) follow-up meetings; inter alia, we will ask their definition of extremism and what they tell their flocks about why suicide bombers do what they do. Ubaidal Haq's query about the alleged USG-Israeli rewritten Koran is likely an accurate reflection of their true world outlook.

CHAMMAS